

Message Text

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PAGE 01 SAPPOR 00001 060118Z
ACTION OES-07

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SUBJECT: NORTHERN JAPAN UNRUFFLED BY JAPAN-SOVIET FISHERY AGREEMENT

REF: SAPPORO 055 DTD 5/77 (NOTAL)

1. SUMMARY: COMPARED TO THE FUROR AROUSED BY LAST MAY'S INTERIM AGREEMENT (REFTEL), NORTHERN JAPAN REACTIONS TO THE RECENT JAPAN-SOVIET FISHERY AGREEMENT FOR 1978 HAVE BEEN RELATIVELY MUTED. ALTHOUGH DISAPPOINTED, THE REGION'S FISHERMEN APPEAR TO BE COUNTING ON CONTINUED GOVERNMENT COMPENSATION AND HIGH FISH PRICES, DUE IN PART TO REDUCED CATCHES IN THE SOVIET 200-MILE ZONE. THE EVIDENT PROSPERITY OF LOCAL FISHERMEN DESPITE EARLIER PREDICTIONS OF CATASTROPHE HAS ALSO DAMPENED PUBLIC SYMPATHY FOR THE INDUSTRY'S TROUBLES. END SUMMARY

2. FISHERMEN IN NORTHERN JAPAN--WHO HAVE IN RECENT YEARS SUPPLIED FROM THE SOVIET ZONE ABOUT 15 PERCENT OF JAPAN'S FISH CATCH--APPEAR TO HAVE ACCEPTED THE ZONE AS A FACT OF
UNCLASSIFIED

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PAGE 02 SAPPOR 00001 060118Z

LIFE. THEIR CRITICISM OF LAST MONTH'S JAPAN-SOVIET FISHERY AGREEMENT HAS FOCUSED ON THE GOJ'S INABILITY TO OBTAIN MORE THAN A 850,000 TON OVERALL QUOTA. THEY ARE PARTICULARLY DISSATISFIED WITH THE POLLACK, CRAB AND SHRIMP QUOTAS WHICH ARE EXPECTED TO RESULT IN THE IDLING OF 60-65 JAPANESE BOATS, MAINLY FROM HOKKAIDO. THEY ARE ALSO UNHAPPY OVER THE GOJ'S FAILURE TO GAIN INCREASED

ACCESS TO FISHING GROUNDS IN THE RUSSIAN ZONE, WITHOUT WHICH THEY FEAR THAT JAPANESE BOATS MAY HAVE DIFFICULTY CATCHING ENOUGH FISH TO FILL THEIR QUOTA ALLOTMENTS. FURTHERMORE, THERE HAS BEEN GRUMBLING IN INDUSTRY CIRCLES THAT, BY AGREEING TO A 650,000 TON SOVIET QUOTA IN JAPAN'S 200-MILE ZONE, THE GOJ CONCEDED MORE THAN IT GAINED IN THE RECENT NEGOTIATIONS.

3. BUT DESPITE THESE CUSTOMARY COMPLAINTS ABOUT THE "WEAKNESS" OF THE GOJ'S FISHERY DIPLOMACY, THE HOKKAIDO FISHING INDUSTRY LEADERS WITH WHOM WE HAVE TALKED LATELY SEEM MUCH LESS WORRIED THAN THEY DID AFTER LAST MAY'S INTERIM AGREEMENT. ONE REASON IS THAT THE EARLIER AGREEMENT, WHICH LED TO THE IDLING OF 350 HOKKAIDO FISHING BOATS, WAS POTENTIALLY FAR MORE DAMAGING THAN THE CURRENT ONE. ANOTHER IS THAT THE INDUSTRY IS APPARENTLY MORE CONFIDENT THIS TIME THAT GOJ EMERGENCY LOANS AND COMPENSATION PAYMENTS WILL ADEQUATELY CUSHION HOKKAIDO FISHERMEN FORCED OUT OF THE SOVIET ZONE. IRONICALLY, THERE ARE ALSO EXPECTATIONS THAT, DUE LARGELY TO REDUCED CATCHES IN RUSSIAN WATERS, FISH PRICES WILL REMAIN HIGH ENOUGH THIS YEAR TO SUSTAIN THE PROSPERITY OF THE ISLAND'S FISHING INDUSTRY.

4. REGIONAL PRESS REACTION TO THE AGREEMENT HAS ALSO BEEN COMPARATIVELY RESTRAINED. WHILE ACKNOWLEDGING

UNCLASSIFIED

PAGE 03 SAPPOR 00001 060118Z

LEDGING THAT THE FISHING INDUSTRY FACES FORMIDABLE DIFFICULTIES, NEWSPAPER COMMENTARY HAS CONSPICUOUSLY AVOIDED DESCRIBING THESE DIFFICULTIES AS A "CRISIS." THIS ATTITUDE APPEARS TO REFLECT A GROWING PUBLIC PERCEPTION THAT, CONTRARY TO EARLIER PRESS PREDICTIONS, THE REGION'S FISHING INDUSTRY HAS BEEN ENJOYING UNPRECEDENTED PROSPERITY SINCE LAST SUMMER, PARTLY AT THE EXPENSE OF THE CONSUMER. FISHERMEN, LIKE MOST LARGE PROCESSORS AND WHOLESALERS, ARE GENERALLY SEEN AS REAPING WINDFALL PROFITS BY TAKING ADVANTAGE OF HIGH FISH PRICES, GENEROUS GOVERNMENT AID, UNUSUALLY GOOD CATCHES IN JAPANESE COASTAL WATERS, AND EXTENSIVE FISH STOCKPILING BEFORE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SOVIET 200-MILE LAW.

5. COMMENT: THE NORTHERN JAPAN REACTION, OR LACK OF IT, SUGGESTS THAT THE SENSE OF CRISIS ENGENDERED BY THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE SOVIET 200-MILE ZONE LAST YEAR HAS NOW LARGELY DISSIPATED BOTH AMONG THE INDUSTRY AND GENERAL PUBLIC. SOVIET FISHING RESTRICTIONS WILL CONTINUE TO AROUSE REGIONAL CONCERN, E.G., DURING THE UPCOMING SALMON NEGOTIATIONS. NEVERTHELESS, THERE APPEARS TO BE A GROWING FEELING THAT THE REGION'S

FISHING INDUSTRY CAN SURVIVE THESE RESTRICTIONS IN THE
SHORT RUN, AND THAT OVER THE LONGER RUN THE INDUSTRY'S
VIABILITY WILL DEPEND LESS ON THE PROBABLY FUTILE
EFFORT TO MAINTAIN TRADITIONAL CATCH LEVELS IN THE
SOVIET ZONE THAN ON DEVELOPING JAPAN'S OWN COASTAL
FISHING RESOURCES. CONSEQUENTLY, WE ANTICIPATE THAT
REGIONAL FISHING INDUSTRY LEADERS WILL STEP UP THEIR
PRESSURE ON THE GOJ TO OBTAIN LARGER BUDGETARY
APPROPRIATIONS FOR THIS PURPOSE.
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